(b) and (c) There are no rules and regulations framed by the Government regarding increasing or decreasing the number of open cast mines. Mines are being opened to bridge the gap between demand and supply. The mine type i.e. under ground or opencast is determined considering the techno-economic and geo-mining condition of the coal deposit proposed for exploitation. The operation of opencast mines are governed by the existing provisions in Mines Act and other rules and regulations there under.

Merger of MTNL and BSNL

3052. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA:
SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the proposal of merger of MTNL and BSNL is under consideration of Government;

(b) if not, the reasons therefor in view of consolidation taking place in the sector;

(c) if so, by when and the issues which have yet not been resolved; and

(d) by when Government are likely to finalize its view on the issue?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to (d) Sir, the Government is examining several options (including merger) for restructuring MTNL and BSNL. Many complex issues relating to HR, differential wage structure in the two PSUs, stamp duty implications etc. are involved in this exercise. The Government will finalize its views only after making careful analysis of the cost involved vis-a-vis benefits of restructuring.

Quality of telecom services in Orissa

3053. MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India's wireless base would cross 40 crore by 2010;

(b) if so, what would be the share of Orissa out of this; and

(c) the action plan of Government to improve the quality of telecom services in the State of Orissa?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEELAHMAD): (a) A target of 50 crore connections by the year 2010 has been set. It is expected that out of these 50 crore connections, more than 40 crore will be mobile connections.

(b) While State-wise targets have not been fixed, steps are being taken to create infrastructure for mobile services in rural and remote areas of the country to enable the citizens to have a mobile phone in any part of the country. State-wise share of phones will also depend on various factors and on relative economic development of State, per capita income etc.

(c) The action plan to improve the quality of telecom services in the State of Orissa *inter-alia* include:

(i) Provision of maintenance free battery sets and engine alternators for back-up power supplies by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL).

(ii) To provide umbrella coverage by providing 3 Base Transceiver Station per Short Distance Charging Area by BSNL.

(iii) 432 towers to be set up in specified rural and remote areas in 30 districts of Orissa with the support from Universal Service Obligation Fund.

(iv) Coverage of all District Headquarters on priority basis by BSNL including coverage of all Tehsil Headquarters and villages having a population of 5000 progressively during 2007-08.

(v) Migration to state-of-art Internent Protocol based Next Generation Network.

(vi) Opening of more telephone exchanges (Remote Switching Units/ Remote Line Units) to reduce length of underground cable.